Care or Neglect? Evidence of Animal Disease in Archaeology

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Many of us start our archaeological careers having some idealization of how earlier cultures cared for the land and animals. We like to imagine that because ancient peoples worked according to the pace of the seasons, they were more in tune with nature as a whole. This volume offers a hefty reality check by reminding us that this was not the case, and that our relationship with both domestic and wild animals was often brutal, complex and ill-informed.

Care or Neglect? is the result of the conference meeting held in Budapest in 2016 of the Animal Palaeopathology Working Group of the International Council for Archaeozoology (ICAZ). While the meeting itself was a celebration of eminent zooarchaeologist Sándor Bökönyi, the proceedings also include a tribute to the influential palaeopathologist Don Brothwell, who died in 2016 during the production of the text.

The theme of the conference, and this subsequent proceedings volume, was how to accurately identify and differentiate malign or benign exploitation of domestic animals found within the archaeological record. The editors introduce the text (1–4) with an

overview of how we currently view Woods et al.'s (1992) 'osteological paradox' within the context of animal/human relationships in the past. The 'paradox' being that if damage or lesions are present, then skeletal remains are considered to have been unhealthy at the time of death. If the bones do not display injury or disease, the specimen is considered healthy. In short, damaged and diseased creatures which survived to manifest skeletal lesions may well have been healthier than those who died before damage was done—how do we establish what the norm actually was?

Each chapter deals with different ways to explore that paradox, with a sequence of clustered themes, commencing with generalized animal pathology. Pawlowska's comprehensive analysis of animal disease in Neolithic Çatalhöyük is impressive (4–23), and sets the bar high, while Bartosiewicz, Nyerges and Biller's re-examination of animal bone assemblages from Bökönyi's Eneolithic site of Polyanitsa, Bulgaria (23–45), ably displays how important palaeopathology is to generating an understanding of changes in prehistoric settlement and society. Gál and Kunst's work on the cattle and horse bones of the Roman sanctuary site of Carnuntum-Mühläcker in Austria (45–61) powerfully demonstrates the theme of the volume itself, scrutinizing the cattle bones which show physical damage of the animals while still alive. Human societal changes having a direct effect on animal husbandry is examined from different perspectives in Marcović et al.'s thought-provoking contribution on the bone assemblages of the Byzantine settlement of Justiniana Prima, Serbia (61–79).

Canine bone assemblages are the focus of the next three contributions, with Hourani's chapter on traumatic injuries to dogs in Laodicea during the Levantine Hellenistic period (79–97) highlighting the 'osteological paradox' exceptionally well. This chapter would be of considerable use in illustrating the concept to archaeology undergraduates. On a similar theme, the pathological assessment of canine bones in Roman Britain by Bellis (97–116), however, shows a considerably lower incidence of abuse cases than the previous chapter on Laodicea, suggesting that the British love of dogs was established early, and was a relationship which endured despite

increased urbanization from Roman occupation. Both hound and horse have had a long, shared relationship with humans, and this is brought into focus with Baron's chapter on horse and dog burials at the Avar cemetery of Vienna Csokorgasse, Austria (116–134) through the detailed descriptions of large canines suitable for herding and horses ridden in the prime of their lives, interred with their deceased humans for a journey into eternity.

This is a particularly useful volume for the equine specialist, with a substantial core of archaeoequestrian research. Taylor and Tuvshinjargal's work on identifying side-reining on riding horses in Mongolia's Late Bronze Age (134–155) was of considerable personal interest, and will likely be cited by anyone looking at lorinery systems of the past. An interesting paper by Cross querying what she believes is an absence of mares in the archaeological record (155–176) will be a worthy area for further research. Meanwhile, the findings presented in the paper by Lyublyanovics provide a heart-warming story of how a (presumably very much loved) medieval horse in Karcag-Orgondaszentmiklós, Hungary was treated and healed from a pelvic fracture (176–185), despite being in a culture where horse meat was a regular part of the diet. Much of the research showcased in this book pertains to the horse cultures of Eurasia, and Bartosiewicz offers a confident chronological overview of observed pathologies in this area (185–208) which will, almost certainly, be a regularly cited piece of work in archaeoequitation; something similar for western Europe would be a welcome companion to this.

Baron's burial assemblages from the Austrian Avar cemetery of Vienna Csokorgasse also included chickens (208–230), which makes for an excellent comparative case with Alison Foster's (2018) work on British poultry. Meanwhile, Bárány explores breeding issues, hypothesizing that the Hungarian Babos 'piggies' from Zalavár/Mosaburg (230–240) which perhaps didn't make it to market, had deformed tusks as a result of hybridization between domesticated animals and wild boar. Human actions which damage animals are examined in Darton and Rodet-Belarbi's study of the harrowing practice of permanent fetters on modern sheep in Delos (240–247),

a traditional means of demobilization which offers a template to compare ancient sheep bones with, while Márta and László Daróczi-Szabó examine several genetic hypotheses tracing the origins of the stunning multi-horned sheep of present-day Hungary (247–256).

The final two papers concentrate on a much neglected area of research, that of fish bones. Harlan and Van Neer define a role for fish palaeopathology (256–276), while the final chapter, by Kivikero, illustrates its deployment with a case study of skeletal abnormalities on fish bones from a medieval context at Kastelholm, Finland (276–288).

Overall, *Care or Neglect?* is a stimulating and diverse read, attractively presented, with something very satisfying for all who are fascinated by the relationship between humans and animals in the past. It is not a text-book—more of a specialized volume for those who wish to be inspired by the varied methodologies used, as much as the results. It is not 'just' about bones; the contributors have used animal remains in many ways to make their past visible including the use of genetics, stable isotope analysis and ethnographic agricultural models alongside conventional zooarchaeological analyses such as quantification, measurement and macroscopic examination.

If one must level any critique at the volume, it could be that the topic occasionally swings widely away from the osteological paradox it had set out to examine, but this is no bad thing. In fact, it adds a great deal to demonstrate what zooarchaeologists actually can achieve, as it sets complex issues in a much wider framework, reminding us that there is indeed more than one way to skin a cat (pun intentional) to address archaeological questions. The great strength of this book is in its contributions to equine zooarchaeology, an area of considerable importance yet often neglected. For this alone, Care or Neglect? makes a robust and vital contribution to archaeological knowledge and has earned its place on the shelf of all zoological and archaeological researchers. It is a worthy addition to anyone's reference collection.

References

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